

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 30, 2012

Honorable Herbert H. Kohl  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration and Related Agencies  
129 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration and Related Agencies  
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kohl and Ranking Member Blunt:

As the subcommittee considers the FY 2013 appropriations bill, we urge you to support robust funding for conservation programs authorized in the farm bill. These programs are crucial tools that support voluntary, cooperative efforts to protect water quality, conserve soil, enhance wildlife habitat, and protect land. These programs not only conserve our nation's natural resources, they also sustain our hunting traditions, and help keep America's working lands in the hands of farm families for generations to come. While we understand you face sizeable challenges in allocating limited dollars across programs, we believe that investments in conserving and enhancing our nation's natural resources should be among the Senate's highest priorities.

Private land comprises nearly seventy percent of the land in the U.S. and conservation programs help farmers and ranchers achieve their goals to be good stewards of that land. They also help defray the costs of meeting environmental standards and regulations. As our nation faces increasing agricultural and environmental challenges, conservation programs will continue to serve as vital tools to help us address those challenges, while protecting the long-term economic viability of family farms across the country. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs address diverse needs across the agricultural spectrum, all while creating economic growth in our rural communities.

In the past five years, farm bill conservation programs have borne a significant share of the deficit reduction burden with over \$2 billion in cuts to mandatory spending for these programs. Yet for a number of affected programs, demand continues to exceed resource availability. For example, in FY 2011 the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) had a total demand for over 78,600 contracts, but available resources could only meet about half that number. Additionally, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) had a backlog of over nine million acres nationwide in calendar year 2011. This story is similar for most conservation programs.

Conservation partnerships with farmers and ranchers are a benefit to communities in our states and across the nation. Some of the farm bill programs that have successfully supported conservation efforts include EQIP, CSP, the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Farm and Ranch Lands

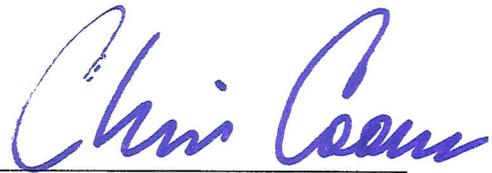
Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). The success of these programs has not been limited to any particular region or part of the country, but rather, stretches across all types of agricultural lands nationwide.

Conserving working lands will be instrumental in our ongoing efforts to protect our nation's natural resources as well as to maintain economic stability and growth in rural communities. We urge you to give farm bill conservation programs strong support in your FY 2013 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL F. BENNET  
U.S. Senator



CHRISTOPHER A. COONS  
U.S. Senator



BARBARA A. MIKULSKI  
U.S. Senator



THOMAS R. CARPER  
U.S. Senator



BERNARD SANDERS  
U.S. Senator



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
U.S. Senator



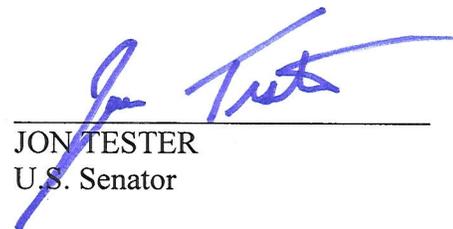
BARBARA BOXER  
U.S. Senator



KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND  
U.S. Senator



MARY L. LANDRIEU  
U.S. Senator



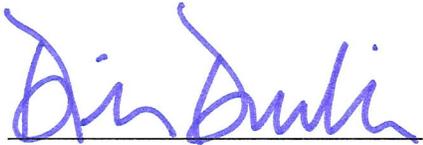
JON TESTER  
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CHARLES E. SCHUMER  
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U.S. Senator



JEANNE SHAHEEN  
U.S. Senator



TOM HARKIN  
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MARK UDALL  
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JEFF MERKLEY  
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TIM JOHNSON  
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PATRICK J. LEAHY  
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